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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, October 8, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "HONEY - FOOD FROM THE FLOWERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

--ooOoo--

Food from the flowers -- that's my topic for today. And that's my definition of honey. If it sounds too romantic for you I challenge you to coin a definition of your own. You may use the most scientific words in your vocabulary. You may get as technical as you please. But when you've finally produced your description of honey it will read like a fairy tale.

You just can't make honey sound commonplace. It originates in the nectar of the flowers. Honeybees collect this nectar bit by bit and change it into a delicious sweet substance. Then they make wax to protect it.

In short that is the romantic past of honey. But I expect you're more interested in honey now, as it is on your own table. You know there is nothing fanciful about the pleasure you get from honey on hot biscuits.

If you're like most persons, you have a preference for honey of one certain color. And this preference of yours generally gives away something about your past. If you like dark buckwheat honey best, then you probably grew up in a State where a lot of buckwheat grew. And you remember white fields of this grain in the late summertime -- the way it smelled and the sound of the bees droning over it as they worked.

Or you might prefer light-colored clover honey. Then it's a good guess that you spent most of your childhood in a part of the country where fragrant clover grew along the roadsides and in big fields.

If you insist that the best honey in the world has the flavor of tupelo or orange blossoms or cotton blossoms, you show you're from the South. It's as sure to give you away as a Dixie accent.

If you're from California you may hold out for honey with the flavor of wild sage. Or that from the star-thistle of the Pacific Coast. And if you're from the Northwest you probably have a warm place in your heart for the lightest honey in the United States -- that from the fireweed that follows forest fires.

When you go shopping for honey you'll notice that most of it for sale is in three forms -- extracted, section comb, and bulk comb honey. You'll find far and away the most extracted honey. Because at least three-fourths of each year's crop is sold in this form.

Of course by extracted honey I mean the liquid honey that comes to market in glass jars. There is no comb left in it at all. Some people prefer their honey just as it comes from the beehive -- comb and all. So they buy

section comb honey. Even the small wooden frame around it is just as it was in the beehive.

A lot of people like the convenient extracted honey, but they think a little added comb makes it more attractive. So they buy bulk comb honey. The beekeepers prepare this honey for market by taking pieces of comb out of shallow frames. Then they pour extracted honey over these pieces of comb and put it in glass jars or tin pails.

Whatever kind of honey you buy, there is only one way to enjoy its full natural flavor. Eat it uncooked. You may like it in sandwich fillings. Or as a sweetener for fruits and cereals. It's good as honey butter on waffles. Honey butter is nothing more than equal parts honey and butter creamed together.

Honey nut sundae is a dish that's delicious enough to have a much fancier name. You make it by simply putting a spoonful of honey on vanilla ice cream and topping this with nuts.

Now you've probably found that you have little difficulty in thinking up ways to use uncooked honey. But if you've ever cooked with honey you know that is a little more complicated.

When you use honey in cooking you use it as a substitute for granulated sugar. As long as you are using it just for a sweetener you may substitute honey cup for cup. But although measure for measure honey and granulated sugar are about equal in sweetness you can't cook them alike.

Honey contains certain oils which give it flavor. If you let honey get above a certain temperature those oils will volatilize -- go off into thin air. And your delightful honey flavor goes off with them.

Honey is different from sugar in chemical composition. While granulated sugar is practically pure carbohydrate, honey is about one-fifth water. And honey is made up of three sugars -- dextrose, sucrose, and levulose.

This levulose is an unusual sugar. It is sweeter, it crystallizes more slowly, and caramelizes at a lower temperature than other sugars. In addition it has the property of absorbing and retaining water. So you see that with the extra water in honey and this ability of the levulose to absorb and retain water, cakes made with honey need less liquid than those made with granulated sugar.

But this won't cause you any trouble if you use only recipes which have been worked out with honey as an ingredient. Naturally the liquid is in the correct proportion if the recipe is reliable. You will only need to watch your oven heat to see that it doesn't get above the temperature required.

I know you won't have any trouble storing honey. Just keep it in a tightly sealed container in a dry place at ordinary room temperature. But no matter how well you store it, it will probably crystallize as it gets older.

Some people like their honey best in this granulated or crystallized form. But if you're not one of them, you can easily get it back into liquid form again. Just set that container of honey into a pan of only moderately hot water. But take care that the water in that pan doesn't get very hot. Because you know that heat injures both the flavor and color of honey.

